

FIRST WORDS
TO
YOUNG CHRISTIANS

by

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CHAPTER EIGHT -
FOES TO GRACE

EVERYTHING good in this world of sin and depravity has foes to encounter, that aim at its destruction. This is especially true of grace in the heart. It did not grow up there naturally of itself, but had to be planted by the divine hand; and the same power that put it there must keep it there, the same agency that gave spiritual life must sustain that life. Nevertheless, we must be co-workers with GOD in this work. We must watch as well as pray against the approach of every spiritual foe. We must not pray against temptation, and then run into it; we must not ask for spiritual health, and then swallow poison. Whatever we find to be an enemy to the work of GOD in our souls, we must be ready to sacrifice, though dear to us as a right hand or a right eye.

Now one thing that tends greatly to destroy the life of GOD in the souls of many young converts is the rage for amusements that abounds in the present day. Unconverted men are called "**lovers of pleasure more than lovers of God.**" This is the object for which they live, the paltry, selfish purpose to which they give up their whole being. This is to be expected from them, and we do not wonder at it. But when those who profess to be dead with CHRIST to the world, and to have risen with Him into a new life, join with the world in their amusements till both get blended together, and the distinction between the world and the church is nearly lost, then is there ground, not merely for astonishment, but for the deepest alarm.

Permit me to say that I am

NO ENEMY TO RECREATIONS

and innocent amusements. The mind of man is not made to be ever upon the stretch. We have as a nation too few holidays (1905), and we should unbend oftener, than we do, amid the beauties of nature and the pleasures of congenial social intercourse.

There is a time to laugh as well as a time to weep. It has been said that JESUS wept, but never laughed. This I do not believe. He was not only GOD, but man also, and it is a part of man's nature to laugh as well as to weep. It is true that we have no account of His laughing, and neither

have we of many other things that doubtless He did, as man. To laugh is not sinful, unless it is at sin we are laughing.

The religion of superstition is always gloomy, but the religion of CHRIST is cheerful, and fills the soul with gladness. Still, all this is no plea for Christians indulging in worldly and sinful amusements. Our religion is to regulate our recreations as well as everything else.

There are few things that tend to hurt the spirituality of Christians in the present day more than those religious festivals and bazaars, got up for the purpose of supporting some religious and benevolent object. The object to be accomplished is so good, the motive of many of those who take part in them is so just, that men get blinded to the many great evils connected with them. These evils are allowed under a religious name and under a religious sanction, so that conscience is confused and seduced, and ceases rightly to perform its functions; and the young Christian is betrayed into calling evil good.

In former times, if a church wanted to build a place of worship, or pay off a debt upon one already built, they put their hands in their pockets and paid it. If voluntary aid could be obtained from GOD's people, good and well; but they never thought of getting up an entertainment that would please the ungodly, and compromise the dignity of truth, for the paltry purpose of getting a little money from the hands of the wicked. Oh, no; they would have worshipped GOD in a barn or in a log schoolhouse all their days rather than have done so!

To see GOD's professed people, respectable matrons, old men, church officers, and young Christians, get up tableaux and theatrical performances, and dress themselves up in some fantastic style, for the purpose of amusing a gaping crowd, is most mortifying and distressing to sober, thoughtful Christians. And then, I am told, that sometimes the whole ends with a raffle, which everybody knows is a species of gambling. Oh, it was a sad sight to see the wicked gambling for our Lord's garments at the foot of the cross, but it is still sadder to see professed Christians encouraging the same evil in the name of our holy religion! **"My soul, come not thou into their secret; unto their assembly, mine honor, be not thou united!"**

The spirituality of individuals and churches is very much injured, in our cities and large towns, by those fashionable parties that have come so much into vogue of late. These parties are often upon a scale of great extravagance and expense, quite inconsistent with the simplicity of CHRIST; and this evil increases as a rivalry gets up among the members of the church as to who will give the finest entertainment.

The whole winter passes off in a round of these assemblages, so that Christians will be called to attend two or three of them in a week. The entertainment is kept up to a very late hour, so that family worship is neglected in most of the homes of those who attend them, and it is to be feared closet worship too. A winter spent in this kind of dissipation is sure to injure the devotional spirit, and to break up those fixed habits of godliness which all professors should form and preserve.

Of course I do not utter one word against social enjoyment with the good. We are made social beings, and many of the purest enjoyments of our lives spring from this source. Religion, instead of repressing this part of our nature, directs and elevates and refines it. But when our social

feelings are indulged at the expense of the health of the soul, we may be sure that they have been carried too far.

One evil leads to another, and I have been told that often these parties end with dancing. Dancing in Christian homes and by Christian people!

If you were struck suddenly with a fatal disease, and eternal realities were to burst upon you as only a death-bed can reveal them, would you send for one of the dancing Christians to pray for you? Or would an awakened soul go to one of them with the question of questions: "**What must I do to be saved?**"

Dancing begun at these parties leads to the ball-room, the ball-room leads to the theatre, that to the bar-room, and the whole to perdition.

Take the following

INCIDENT FROM THE EXPERIENCE OF A PASTOR:

"A most interesting work of grace occurred in a church in this city. Many anxiously inquired what they should do to be saved.

"Among this number was a young lady who listened to the voice of truth, and was troubled. Conscience spoke, and she felt the claims of GOD on her; but she could not now attend to the matters of her soul's salvation. On one evening the meeting was more than usually arresting and solemn; the next evening a ball was to be held, and from this scene of solemnity she hurries away and joins in the giddy dance. By the sound of the violin and the voice of melody she tried to drown the admonitions of conscience; and for a little time succeeded.

Amid the display of fashion, the glare of lights, and the intoxication of the scene, conscience slumbered, and suffered the gay transgressor to revel undisturbed in forbidden pleasure.

"But again she feels herself a sinner, and again she is at the meeting for conversation and prayer. Her heart is the seat of many painful emotions. The claims of truth and duty are urged. She would yield - she would follow the SAVIOUR; but the theatre, the ball-room, her gay companions, how can she give up these?

"She was solicited to attend another ball. She went. Satan, as an angel of light, shed a deceptive radiance over the scene; she tried to be happy - tried to believe that her seriousness was melancholy, and that she had yet plenty of time to prepare for eternity. She returned to her dwelling; but she returned to die - to die without hope.

"I did not think," said she, "that I should have to die so soon."

"One evening at the inquiry meeting, the next at the ball-room - gayest among the gay; a few nights more, and she is in her coffin! One week, with a heart light as air, she goes to a store to purchase trimmings for a hall-dress; on the next week her friends go to the same store to

purchase her shroud."

I believe it was Richard Cecil, who, when traveling in a stage-coach, heard a young lady talking to her companion about an anticipated ball.

"Oh!" said she, "I do enjoy a ball so. I enjoy the thought of its coming on, I enjoy the pleasure while it lasts, and I like to think of it after it is over!"

"I think, madam," said Mr. Cecil, "there is

A FOURTH PLEASURE

that you have forgotten to mention."

"Indeed, sir, I don't remember it; what do you refer to?"

"The pleasure it will afford you, madam, when you come to die."

The remark was an arrow sent by the SPIRIT of GOD, and led to her conversion.

Just as Satan quoted Scripture even to our Lord, so do men quote the Bible to defend dancing. David dancing before the Lord, as an expression of his joy when the ark of GOD was restored, and Miriam dancing at the wonderful national deliverance at the Red Sea, are often referred to. That was the mode in which the people of the East expressed their joy, just as rending their garments, or throwing dust and ashes upon their heads, was their mode of expressing sorrow. We have no instance of promiscuous dancing; whenever mentioned, the sexes are separate. This was the case with Miriam, and also in other places, when referred to. But to make these cases an excuse for the promiscuous intermingling of the sexes, the indecent polkas and waltzes of modern times, the shameless exposure of person, the late hours, and all the many evils that attend the ball-room, is an insult to the sacred Scriptures, and an outrage upon common sense.

It is seeking to make the source of all truth and goodness responsible for error and wrong.

And what shall we say of professing Christians going to the theatre, the circus, and such places of resort?

The best that can be said of the theatre is that it is a place of vain amusement. Now recreations and amusements are sometimes necessary; and doubtless there are amusements to which good people can engage with the strictest propriety, and with advantage to themselves, both physically and intellectually. But the theatre is not one of them.

It has been well said:

"Amusements must be blameless, as well as ingenious; safe, as well as rational; moral, as well as intellectual. Whatever pleantry of idea, whatever gaiety or sentiment, whatever airiness of expression, should we not jealously watch against any unsoundness in the general principle, and

mischievous in the prevailing tendency?"

Tried by such a test the theatre is a place utterly unfit for good people to visit. It inculcates false principles of action and false views of life; it deadens all finer feelings of our nature by making wounds, shrieks, groans, murders and assassinations the subject of a pleasing excitement; and, in short, many of its most popular exhibitions are grossly immoral.

Theatres show what their direct tendencies are by gathering around them the worst houses and the worst characters in a community. The lowest drinking houses, gambling hells, and places of public infamy gather as if by attraction around the theatre. There are to be found attracted the swindler, the gambler, the black-leg, the coarse, the vulgar, the blood-thirsty - vile men and shameless women.

The common council of Boston at one time prohibited liquor from being sold on the premises of the Tremont Theatre, and the trustees publicly protested against the order on the ground that it was impossible to support the theatre without it. Are these the kind of places that Christians should patronize?

The theatre has, it is true, been called a school of morals; but it is easy to give the finest names to the vilest things. On this point, Dr. Thompson, of New York, says:

"If the theatre is a place of wholesome moral influence - a school of virtue, as it is sometimes called - then it is proper for me as a Christian minister to frequent it, and to urge my church to do so likewise. But this would be considered quite out of character by the mass of playgoers. And why? Not merely because of my profession, but because the theatre is known to be

AN UNFIT PLACE FOR ANY SERIOUS-MINDED MAN

"Some years ago, a clergyman residing in the vicinity of Boston visited a theatre in that city in order to study the elocution of a distinguished actor. To avoid being recognized, lest his example should do injury, he took his seat in the pit with his hat drawn over his brow. But a wag near by soon discovered who he was, and when next the curtain dropped, peering under the discomfited clergyman's hat, he pronounced his name aloud with an oath and an exclamation of surprise, and then added, with mock gravity:

"Let us pray!"

"The effect was highly ludicrous. The audience was convulsed with laughter. But why so ludicrous? Is prayer a ludicrous thing? Is it ludicrous for a sinful, dependent creature to offer supplication to his Maker? No; there is a great deal of solemn appealing to Heaven even on the stage. Apart from the manner, it was the felt incongruity of the thing that provoked a laugh. The thought of prayer in such a place, the presence of a Christian minister, or of any man making pretensions to piety, amid such scenes, amused that pleasure-loving audience. That laugh disclosed the character of the place, and the object of their assembling."

We may rest assured that where there is a craving after the excitement of worldly amusements,

there is a very low state of religion in the soul, if there is any religion at all.

The soul that lives near GOD has a fulness of joy and peace the most satisfying. The soul that drinks of the river of life will not stoop to drink of the filthy puddles of sin. The heart in which CHRIST dwells has no room for His enemies.

"Tis not for man to trifle! Life is brief,
And sin is here.
Our age is but the falling of a leaf,
A dropping tear.
We have no time to sport away the hours
All must be earnest in a world like ours."

~ end of chapter 8 ~
